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Conscripts of Conscience

By

CAROLINE ATWATER MASON

Author of "A Lily of France," "The Little Green God," "The Binding of the Strong," "World Missions and World Peace," "The Spell of Italy," etc.



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I

“THE MYSTERIOUS MAJOR”

ON the upper deck of the U. S. transport *Cumberland*, west-bound, just after sunset of a winter day, a girl in white uniform with the caduceus and cape of the Red Cross, was pacing the deck alone.

As she turned each time on reaching the very brief limit she appeared to have set for her walk, this girl's eyes fixed themselves on the closed white door of a deck cabin bearing the number 55. Her glance was keen, her step firm, her fresh colour suited to the vivid lining of her semi-military cape. The minutes passed, the watcher was

growing manifestly uneasy as she moved on beyond the white door for the hundredth time when a voice behind her called "Kate!" The girl wheeled quickly, coming back upon her tracks to meet the speaker, who saluted her with the cool comment:

"How long have you been prowling, and why?"

Kate Quimby's colour was heightened as she met her mate, who was indeed well worth waiting for, any one would say,—a girl taller than herself and more distinguished, although younger, her fine little head uncovered, her movements boyishly unconscious but full of angular grace. This girl wore a blue uniform, dull and faded; a tiny striped ribbon was fastened on her breast.

"I told you I should be here, Merle,"

the other said with emphasis, “because I propose to-night that you shall go down to dinner, that you shall see something beside the walls of your stateroom. Now hurry down, but don’t hurry back. I shall keep my ear at the keyhole, trust me for that, and the nurse is all right. How are things going?”

“Not so badly. The poor old dear has been seasick and it seems to occupy her mind.”

“What a good idea! Now run along.”

The young woman called Merle by her friend because her name was Mary Earle, was obviously, however, in no hurry for dinner, for she put her hand through the other’s arm and drew her over to the ship’s rail. The sea was running fresh and strong. The sun

had set and a gradation of delicate colour from the sea's horizon line ranged through rose and pale yellow to the blue above, where a great planet hung, faintly luminous.

"How can anything be so calm as this sky and sea seeing the chaos which men have made of the earth!" murmured Kate Quimby.

"Oh, I don't know," replied her friend musingly; "perhaps it may strike you that way. I've an idea it will be harder for me to stand the un-seeing people when we get home than this aloofness of ——" here she broke off. Two persons were passing, very small and feminine persons, clad in silk as padded and soft as their footsteps.

"Who are they?" Mary Earle asked when they were out of hearing. "Chinese students?"

"Yes, medical. Also Christian."

"Good. Where are they to go?"

"Philadelphia, I believe."

"Oh," plainly disappointed. "You don't suppose there's a chance they might know my little Ilien Siu?"

"Hardly. You know China is fairly well populated. But now, Merle, don't stop for any more meditation. The stewards will have the whole dinner outfit swept by the board."

"Kate! if I should lose my ice-cream!" with which Mary Earle, laughing in mock dismay, made a dash for the companionway and vanished.

Entering the gaily lighted dining saloon below for the first time since they had left Le Havre, three days before, Mary followed a steward who led her to her place on the right hand of Dr.

Frazier, the ship's surgeon, whom she knew. He rose to receive and welcome her, then presented to her Captain Preston, the gentleman at her left. The chair opposite her was unoccupied.

Having advised her seriously regarding the weak and strong points of the menu and set the steward flying to bring the lady of the best, Dr. Frazier proceeded to question Dr. Earle (for so he addressed her) regarding her patient, Miss Wallace, the head of the nurses in her medical unit. As Captain Preston was thoroughly interested in his dinner and as there was no one to be interested in their conversation, Dr. Frazier was able to discuss the case professionally for a moment with the girl in the faded French uniform, whom he treated with

conspicuous regard as a professional equal. Mary, however, had not fully completed her medical course, but having entered the service in France technically as a qualified nurse, she had been pressed into the work of an army doctor by reason of the great need and of her manifest professional skill.

Low-voiced and reticent, Mary now had gone so far as to acknowledge war neurasthenia approaching shell-shock as diagnosis, when, glancing up, she became aware that into the chair at Dr. Frazier's left there was slipping at the moment a young lady in airy evening dress,—to her unaccustomed eyes a rare and radiant vision. Dr. Frazier concealed an instant's sense of disappointment at the interruption as he rose once more to do his devoir and introduce Dr. Earle, of Springfield,

Massachusetts, to Miss Chilton, of Tarrytown, New York.

Miss Chilton, of Tarrytown, Mary Earle perceived, was young and of personal radiance matching well her attire. Mary noted brown hair parted Madonna-wise over a wide brow, large eyes meditative in their survey, and an innocent, childlike mouth.

“ I am so glad you have shown yourself at last, Dr. Earle! ” the newcomer exclaimed with an artless laugh. “ I have had the most immense curiosity to see you. ” Her eyes stole to the tiny ribbon on Mary’s severe blue tunic. “ To think of at last meeting a life-sized war heroine, ” and Miss Chilton sighed wistfully.

Ignoring all this, but good-humouredly, Mary asked in a matter-of-fact tone:

“Are you not the Miss Chilton of whom I heard as connected with the Red Cross canteen work near Compiègne?”

“Yes, I have been connected with a canteen there until they sent me home, to my sorrow,” and Miss Chilton shook her head pensively, but a deep flush crept from her throat up to her temples, betraying a certain confusion which neither of her companions appeared to observe.

Mary Earle, having achieved and finished the wished-for ice-cream, rose with a word of excuse and passed from the dining saloon. As she essayed the lowest step of the companionway it developed a sudden tendency to rise up and overthrow her; accordingly she was not ungrateful to find her right arm firmly supported by Captain

Preston. Unnoticed by her he had come from the table behind her.

“Some sea on to-night, Doc!” he remarked jocosely.

Mary knew the type too well to be annoyed; her fastidiousness had been humanized by two years in the war zone of France.

“Glad you girls shed the light of your countenance on us at last at the table. We’ll have it a little livelier after this, I guess. Ain’t that Miss Chilton a bird though?”

Mary laughed frank acquiescence. They had reached the second deck now and she was for hastening forward to the aft stair which would lead directly to her stateroom on the deck above. Captain Preston followed. Far down the dimly lighted recesses of the second cabin, as they overlooked it

for a moment, she noted casually a solitary man's figure moving, a tall man with bent head, albeit military outline. There was nothing in the sight to arouse her interest; the ship carried some hundreds of returning soldiers, the greater part wounded, but she was startled by an exclamation at once astonished and exultant from the Captain.

They had reached the upper deck now and Mary was aiming straight for the door of Number 55. At his exclamation she halted, glancing at him questioningly.

“The mysterious Major!” he ejaculated. “As I live, the mysterious Major! I vow I am not mistaken. I know him by his square shoulders if nothing else and the way he drops his head down. But the coincidence!

That's what I'd call an A number one coincidence. The two of 'em at a time," and he chuckled at the notion.

Mary, anxious now for return to her patient, did not stop for questions, but the obvious incomprehension of her look brought challenge from the Captain.

"What! you haven't even heard of the Major?"

"Not a word."

"Gracious! then the whole thing is lost on you. Say," as she would have vanished from sight, "it's time for you to come out of your den and find out what they're talking about on board the *Cumberland*. I don't say but what you're an M. D. all right, but you're just straight girl for aught I can see all the same."

"And I'm not an M. D. either when

you come to that,” Mary called back from the threshold of Number 55. “Not by six months. Good-night.”

The Captain looked after her a moment with a puzzled expression, then started on his after dinner twenty-times round of the deck, enjoying the flavour of a freshly lighted cigar, as well as that of his “A number one coincidence.”

II

AN AFTERNOON OFF

AT the end of a week Miss Wallace was so far improved as to occupy a deck chair near her cabin door; also to insist upon both her doctor and regular nurse taking an afternoon off. This insistence being reinforced by Kate Quimby, who established herself in charge for the rest of the day, the nurse promptly vanished and Mary Earle, with backward glances of lingering solicitude at her patient, betook herself to a nook which she had often longed to make her own for even one hour. This was on the promenade deck,—a narrow, fixed

bench in a niche at the ship's stern where no one seemed to pass.

To be alone and still, and for the whole afternoon if it suited her! Mary Earle threw wide her arms, tipped her head back against the hard white superstructure behind her and laughed audibly, so delicious was the sensation. Presently her mental exercises were running on this fashion:

“ I'm going to think about anything I like. . . . Let's see, clothes would be interesting. How pretty that girl was last night in her light evening dress. Wouldn't it be fun to 'dress up' again like that! I suppose I shall when I get home. . . . I shall certainly have some new things. Lucia will help if Mother is too busy, and of course she will be. . . . I wonder if she will have to preside at Daughters

or Dames the day I get home. . . .
I wonder if dear Grandmother will be
at a missionary meeting when I arrive.
Those engagements never could be set
aside, I remember, for any event. I
imagine I shall be rather an event for
a day or two. . . . I wonder if
Paul's youngsters will really play with
those toys in my trunk or whether they
will just admire them. Children are
so terribly polite . . . also uncer-
tain. . . . Probably Lucia will
never wear that scarf. It cost a lot,
but she hardly ever fancies the things
I do. . . . I wish I had had a
glimpse of that surgeon they call 'the
mysterious Major' yesterday when
Wallace corralled him. Poor fellow!
I suppose he thought he could get by
one lone woman and reach the Cap-
tain's cabin unobserved,—she looking

so much like a mummy. It wasn't fair of her. How could she intercept him, knowing that he wishes to escape all that. It wasn't a bit like Wallace, dear old soul, but then, she's not a bit like herself, that mustn't be forgotten, not for a minute. All the same it was cruel. . . . Still I wonder if it is so very bad, after all, as she said. . . . I have seen things that must be worse. You don't mind if you can help. Let that go! How stupid to pretend to myself that I want to think! What I really want is not to think at all, then I shan't mind not being so happy as I ought to be . . . and having always this senseless weight on my heart. . . . I hate myself for it but I can't get rid of it. And I thought it would be the seventh heaven to be homeward bound. . . . There! I feel a tear racing

down each of my cheeks. Heaven alone knows why. . . . Silly to lie just to myself! I do know perfectly. . . . *It is so awful to dread to go home and I do.* . . . Now I have made my confession perhaps I shall have peace . . . a little peace. . . . There is no use in laying everything to being tired. We were cold and hungry and muddy and dead for want of sleep most of the time, but that was nothing. Life was worth while and we loved it. . . . Can I make it worth while now on the old lines? I used to think just to devote myself to my profession was a little bit plucky, itself. It wasn't. Now, the big motive being taken out of the work, I see well enough that at home what I was really after was to make my living by a line on which I had some chance to distinguish myself,

since the bent was in the blood. . . .
Just the old unending *ego* that never is
really beaten. Oh, God, make me bigger
than I am! I can't go back to take
on the social competings and perpetual
strivings to 'make good,'—that cheap
old self-sufficient program. . . . I
believe I have almost forgotten how to
pray,—except for my patients,—but
about that, Christ understands. Lord,
Thou knowest all things. . . . Lord,
Thou knowest that I love Thee. . . ."

III

MISS CHILTON OPENS HER HEART

HALF an hour later Mary Earle opened her eyes after deep sleep and again laughed alone to find herself vexed at first flush at the probability that the deck steward with afternoon tea had passed her by. Wrapped as she was in her heavy rug she made her way out of her nook to the frequented part of the deck and stood for a moment in the sun, blinking, her hair tossed, her cheeks flushed with sleep. For a moment she noticed nobody, then a voice close at hand said:

“ Won’t you sit down in this chair beside mine, Dr. Earle? The steward

will be coming this way with tea very soon. I hate taking it alone."

Miss Chilton, in a big white cloak and white tam-o'-shanter, wrapped neatly in a rose-hued rug, struck Mary as looking like a very pretty baby in a baby-carriage. She preferred not to talk baby talk just then, but for manners' sake sat down and the two struggled for a moment together to enfold her long limbs decorously in her rug, which displayed all the perversity of its nature.

When they had placed emptied cups on the deck beside their chairs Mary, beginning to provide for retreat to her own stronghold, found herself detained by Miss Chilton's hand laid on her arm. A glance into her companion's face showed Mary that she was about to receive some outpouring of confidence

more or less emotional. She knew the tokens, so resigned herself, being wonted to revelation of the secrets of hearts on brief acquaintance.

“ Please stop a minute more, Dr. Earle,” murmured Miss Chilton, with a pathos in her eyes and voice which Mary at once inwardly declared sincere. “ I know you live to help people who need help and I am perfectly wretched. May I tell you about it? You are the only human being on this ship whom I could open my heart to, and I think it will burst.”

Plainly the heart must be opened. Mary relaxed, abandoned the glorious prospect of an afternoon alone and turned with serious attention fully to face the sufferer.

“ I have only met you three times before this. although I always go to

dinner hoping you will be there, but the first time I saw you, you spoke of having heard of me as a canteen worker at Compiègne. Would you mind telling me just exactly what you heard?"

"Do you mean that? Do you want me to tell you a part of what I heard or all of it? There was very little anyway, I assure you, and it was pure gossip, nothing of any real importance."

"It is right for me, I assure you, to know everything that was said."

"Very well," Mary returned in businesslike fashion, after a moment's recollection; "it was said that you were very taking and pretty, but not the stuff for a nurse,—I believe you came over as a nurse?" Miss Chilton nodded. "And that some flirtation with a medical officer was in the way of

your amounting to very much as a canteen worker."

"Was that all you heard?" Miss Chilton's cheeks had flushed at first but now she had grown paler than her wont.

"Every word as far as I can remember."

"Did you hear the name of the officer . . .?"

"No. If I did I have forgotten it. I think those who mentioned you had never met you or him, supposing that there was a *him*."

"Yes, there was, but there isn't a grain of truth in the statement that I had a flirtation, Dr. Earle. I am afraid it is true that I wasn't a success—at anything," the girl added humbly. "But the real story is so utterly different, so much more serious."

“Go on, if you will,” Mary said kindly.

“I came over to France because I was engaged to a physician ten years older than I, Dr. Minot Balfrey. We had not known each other long, only became engaged just as he was sailing nearly three years ago, with the —— Medical Unit—of course, under the British flag. I found it too hard to endure the separation. No one, you see, outside my own family knew of my engagement, and I took a quick course in nursing and came over to be nearer . . . you know . . .”

“It has been done frequently, I think,” said Mary gravely.

“Well, I was most of the time in Paris or Compiègne, and he was around Dieulouard and I saw him only once before something terrible hap-

pened, Dr. Earle. That was just three months ago. Perhaps I did a cruel thing but I surely thought it was my duty; certainly it was the hardest sacrifice a girl could make." Miss Chilton's eyes overflowed and her lips quivered.

Mary waited in silence for what was to follow; she was very sorry for the girl and yet her sympathy left her curiously cold.

"You remember perhaps there was a very sharp engagement near Braucourt in the autumn? Dr. Balfrey was there in charge of a Medical Detachment of the —— Infantry. He did the most impossibly splendid things, going out over the ground swept by shrapnel to direct the bringing in of the wounded, and almost to the enemy lines, in the face of machine-gun fire.

He was magnificent. They made him Major at top speed . . . but, Dr. Earle, he was shockingly wounded in that engagement and he would not receive attention until the boys had all been looked after. That is what he is like. And with all his pluck he is so very religious,—most unusual, don't you think, for an army doctor? he prays with the poor fellows when they are going to die,—just like a chaplain."

Mary gave Miss Chilton's hand a sympathetic touch. Her eyes asked the question which the latter hastened to answer.

"His wounds were all in the face and neck and very severe. When he was released from the hospital he came to me. . . . I hadn't seen him until then. I should never have known him, that is looking at him from this side,"

and she put her hand up to the right side of her face. "He is changed beyond what any one could dream,—hideously and beyond repair changed. What do you think I ought to have done? . . . as a physician I mean, Doctor. I thought of the future. . . . I can't very well explain, but you must understand what suffering might result if we were to go on and be married. . . . I felt I had not the right to involve innocent creatures in what might be an awful handicap, you see?"

Mary bowed her head in sober acquiescence, reflecting that here was after all quite the Greek theory, however shaky the foundation for it.

"And so your engagement was broken?" she prompted, longing for the confidence to conclude.

“Yes. But, now, as a physician,” Miss Chilton clung to the phrase, “what would you say, Dr. Earle? Don’t you think I did right?” and the imploring eyes were fastened on Mary’s face.

“I am sorry, Miss Chilton, but it would be perfectly impossible for me to give an opinion. There is too much that I cannot really know, you see.”

The girl, disappointed, held in reserve her finishing stroke.

“You could tell better, naturally, if you saw Major Balfrey, and that is the strangest part of it all. You can see him any day on board. At least, it is difficult, but many do see him. I never knew it until this very morning, but he is on this ship, Dr. Earle. Think of it! Of course I should never have sailed on her if I had dreamed of

such a thing. He came on at the very last moment, it seems, in charge of a batch of wounded."

"You have seen him?"

Miss Chilton started convulsively and pressed her hands over her eyes.

"Oh, no, no. I must never see him again. It would be too hard for us both."

"Does he know you are on the ship?"

"I think not. I pray not. . . . The person who told me about it doesn't know one word of all this, didn't dream that I had ever met Major Balfrey. Think of listening while she talked on and told how some heartless creature had thrown him aside because of his injuries; how he will never leave the second cabin or steerage, fearing so to meet any one

who will suffer from seeing his poor face. . . . I suppose because I couldn't help fainting and because of what followed. . . . It is too dreadful to have hurt him so. . . . But this woman says he is simply wonderful in his care of the wounded men . . . they all adore him and he devotes every moment ——” Here Miss Chilton burst into the tears obviously inevitable.

Dr. Earle rose, patting her soothingly on the shoulder.

“Just tell me that you understand . . . that I was not selfish . . . in releasing him . . .” sobbed the girl.

“I think you did what seemed to you right, dear Miss Chilton. It was all very, very hard, I realize that. I should say that Major Balfrey had the heavy end to bear, you know, but I am

sorry enough for you, too. Now I am going along the deck to speak to some girls for a few minutes, and you must have your cry out by yourself. It will do you no harm and people are not passing this way."

"Won't you come back at all?" appealed the other.

"Yes, very soon, but not to stay long."

With this, leaving her rug behind and pulling her small blue service cap straight as she went, Doctor Mary walked down the deck to a point amidships where she had caught sight of the two Chinese girls standing alone by the rail. She returned twenty minutes later, her own manner firm and buoyant, glad to find that the force of Miss Chilton's present distress seemed to have spent itself.

“ Such an interesting talk I have had with those Chinese girls,” Mary began, taking for granted some interest in the subject. “ They are so resolute and so keen mentally though they seem like soft, fluffy little birds before you know them. Fancy, they are going seven thousand miles from their homes and families, going to Johns Hopkins, to study bacteriology. Then they will return to China and do their part to bring in decent methods of treating and preventing disease.”

“ Really splendid of them, isn't it? ” commented Miss Chilton.

“ I had a ridiculous notion that they might know something of a little class-mate of mine in New York in the Medical School, a Chinese girl named Ilien Siu. I am very fond of her. That was why I wished to speak with

them; this is really the first chance I have had."

"Did they know her?"

Mary shook her head.

"Of course they would not, China being so vast. These girls will only have to stay in America a year, I find. My poor little Ilien, Miss Chilton,—here's heroism for us—came over alone into voluntary exile for a five years' medical course when she was only eighteen. She has still a whole year of hospital work before she will get her degree."

"Why does it take so much less time now?" with civil show of interest.

"Because now, I have just been told, there are one or two medical schools for girls *in China*—a thing perfectly new and certainly very fine. Somebody with brains has been at

work over there, evidently. Now I will go back to my lair for a little while, but I want to thank you, Miss Chilton, for your confidence. You can depend upon my silence, also upon my being truly grieved for you. It is certainly grievous all around."

Constance Chilton, essaying a wan smile, looked up into Mary's face with tragic eyes.

"It is simply," she faltered, "that I am broken-hearted. That is all."

Mary passed on, if not perfectly convinced as to the girl's broken heart, at least very gentle of mood toward her, but with a certain sternness on her mouth when her thought reverted to the no longer mysterious Major.

IV

THE EARLES

“**W**ELL, it was great work, Mary, for a fact. Cæsar Augustus! what ‘cursed spite’ that a girl like you should get the chance! Here I, your elder and better, lag superfluous as a Massachusetts camp doctor until the armistice closes up the whole show.” Paul Earle’s grim set of jaw testified that the acrimony of his words was tempered, not assumed, for sake of courtesy to his sister.

“You envy me, of course, old man,” Mary responded, reaching out to lay her hand on his khaki shoulder; “still you don’t quite hate me, do you?”

The brother and sister sat by the fireside in the library of the Earle homestead; the early winter twilight had already settled in and only the glow of a mass of half-burned logs in the chimney made each clearly visible to the other.

“ I should hardly put it as strong as hate, I think,” replied Dr. Paul Earle meditatively, “ but it’s a pretty severe test of affection, that you must realize yourself. Still, we will, if you please, remain friends.”

“ Quite so. It becomes highly important that we do when you look ahead and take in the fact that in just about five months I shall have my diploma, if I win through ——”

“ Of course there is a fighting chance that you may be plucked yet,” put in Paul, laughing ironically.

“How brotherly,” commented Mary. “As I was saying, if all goes as planned, in about six months I shall affix a modest shingle out there by the office door, below yours, and we shall be partners. Really, you mustn’t allow yourself to become seriously embittered; it would be awkward for the firm.”

There was a moment of silence which Paul broke by remarking:

“You’ve had a species of trial marriage; I mean, a mighty good chance to try out this business of being a woman in medicine, surgery rather, in fact you’ve had it at the hardest. Women doctors in these parts seldom have to help repair bridges under bombardment, or perform operations on men encased in filth and mud, or do various other of those stunts you have

been up against. But all this apart, you ought to have a pretty clear notion now of how you like the job, shutting off the hereditary and conscientious and feministic prepossessions in which of old you indulged pretty freely. At close range, how do you like it? Do you really want to go on?"

"I really do, although I am not so keen for it as I was over there, Paul. My practice of medicine seems comparatively unimportant I'll have to admit here at home, but I shall get used to that, I suppose. I can't say that any one in Springfield seems to be suffering or dying for lack of my attention."

"Oh, no, you've got to learn now to put up with weaker stimuli. Isn't it Mrs. Deland?—somebody says, 'we have fed on champagne and red pepper

and now our diet is to be skimmed milk '?"

"Yes," Mary returned a little pensively, "that describes my present sensations very neatly. However, unless you really hate me as a partner, Paul, I am for carrying on. Do you see anything better for me to do?"

"Better? Oh, well, that depends, of course, on the point of view. You're making a bully doctor, that I'll have to admit in spite of my perfectly natural prejudice against you," again the whimsical smile. "Oh, yes, Mary, I rather like the notion of our practising together myself; since you've had this war experience I'm much more for it than I ever was before. You're made of mighty good material and I am proud as Lucifer of you, if the truth were to leak out."

“ You say you like the notion yourself. Does that mean that Mother doesn’t?” Mary bent forward and with shovel and tongs urged the half-burnt logs into flame. This done she looked searchingly into her brother’s face.

Paul shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“ I suppose she talks to you more freely than she would to me,” Mary added. “ She is such a splendid sport she wouldn’t like ——” here she broke off.

“ That’s right. Mother plays the game according to the rules. I don’t think she has ever had the slightest qualm at the woman-in-medicine notion *per se*; unluckily she *has* got it into her head that you’re handsome, you know, or something of the sort, and so ——”

“ Paul!” Mary broke in, laughing. “ You’ve never been disturbed with hesitation for any such reason.”

“ Never. Lucia and I—of course you can trust your sister-in-law and your brother for that,—have never agreed with Mamma on that point. ‘ Not handsome, but distinguished ’ is our formula; quite nice and fraternal, don’t you think? ”

With these words Paul rose. Some one was coming in at the far end of the dim, book-lined room.

“ Here you are, Mother,” he called, and drew a cushioned chair to the fender between himself and Mary.

“ How perfect,” sighed Mrs. Earle, as she seated herself, holding out a hand to each, her look finely maternal. “ I handed over the meeting to Mrs. Patton and hurried home, hoping for

this twenty minutes together before tea. Now—don't stand—but sit, and deliver just what you were talking about when I came in. Let's go right on from where you broke off. Your voices sounded so interesting."

"Oh, we were simply speaking of the fact that you are not very keen about Mary's practising medicine, partly, as I understand it, because she is rather good-looking, and all that. That you would, after all, be glad to have her reconsider, ending her professional career with this military distinction that she has contrived to pull off."

Mrs. Earle laughed low and fondly. Paul pleased her, habitually.

"It does seem rather a pity," she commented, her eyes on the fire, Mary's hand still in hers.

“But really, Mother, I don’t see why,” the girl began with some eagerness; “my life would be seclusion and leisure compared with the life you live. Just look at what you do! you are president of the Woman’s Society of the church and secretary of the Tuesday Club, and then there are the Daughters and Dames, the Liberty Loan Association, the Library Committee—chairman of that—the Red Cross, the National Defense, Food Conservation, and ——” Here Mrs. Earle stopped her, laughing.

“Perfectly true, Mary. But I am fifty-four years old. I have very recently, while you were away, clarified my own thinking by a new—formula, let us call it. I heard Paul talking of formulas when I came in. Between twenty and forty-five for the sake of

round numbers — I would say — a woman's most delightful quality—I mean aside from religion and morals, is glamour."

"Glamour!" cried the son and daughter in concert. "What can you mean?"

"Look in your dictionary. It is a fresh synonym for charm, a word of which I am tired; also it means more and other; perhaps it has a touch of mystery. It is a thing superadded to looks, wit and grace, and, from the personal point of view, it is the thing most to be desired. After fifty it would be superfluous if it persisted, which it does not."

"There is nothing like glamour about me," laughed Mary Earle frankly.

"That is not proof that there might

not be if you gave yourself a chance. I haven't the smallest doubt that Mary can succeed respectably in medicine; she might, just as Paul might, become even distinguished. Your father did, and you are both like him. But to win your way in this or any other profession of a like nature, Mary, you must forfeit ——"

"Glamour!" cried Mary. "I see. It doesn't comport with the woman doctor,—‘there are no mystical meanings in fruit of that colour.’ Therefore, in order to gain this precious indefinable something, you would like me to stay at home like the other girls, go in moderately for philanthropy and religion, for society, bridge, amateur dramatics and dancing. ‘All things by turns and nothing long!’ How I should hate such a life! My father's

daughter! Why should I any more than my father's son? "

Mary was interrupted at this point by the entrance of Mrs. Paul Earle with two cherubic children whose effect was to render Mrs. Earle instantaneously all grandmother, Paul all father, and Mary all fond aunt. As the maid appeared with the tea-tray at one door, a soft rustle of silk was heard at another, and there came in to join the group around the fireplace a white-haired woman, tall, slender and erect. There was a headlong rush of the children in her direction and a general chorus of joy that "Granny was in time for tea." Plainly, Mrs. Earle's mother, Mrs. Lorimer, was popular in the family.

V

A SHIPMATE

“CAPTAIN PRESTON, U. S. A.” Mary Earle read the card presented to her on a tray, looked at the waiting maid, and, pronouncing the name aloud, said with a puzzled expression:

“Who is Captain Preston? I am sure I can’t think.” At the moment she was standing before her mirror fastening in place a new hat with soft plumes which interested her.

“I’m sorry, Miss Mary, but I can’t tell you that, for I never saw him before. He’s a fine set-up officer, anyhow ——”

“ Oh, of course, Lizzie,” Mary interrupted, “ I know now perfectly well. But, dear me, how can I stop to talk with him when I have promised to call at the parish house for Granny, and I’ve told the children they should have a bit of a drive first, and ——” Mary paused, regarded the back of her head attentively for a moment in a hand glass, then, with a smile at Lizzie which infused sudden warmth into the girl’s soul, she summed up the situation with, “ It’s all right. I’ll go down and see him. Will you give Frank word not to bring out the car until I send for him and then tell the children Aunt Mary will give them their drive after she brings Grandmother home instead of before.”

With this Mary ran down to the drawing-room, where she received her

shipmate of the *Cumberland* with unaffected but not exaggerated cordiality.

“ I won’t hold you up, Doctor, not on your life. Don’t worry. I guess I know that every minute in the day counts for a professional woman,” the Captain thus launched forth on his conversational activity. “ You see it’s this way:—I’m headed for Camp Devens, but as I got near Springfield this afternoon thinks I, how I’d like to look in and see Dr. Earle, so I stopped off just a train. You know you and I hit it off pretty well there on board, though I never saw much of you, not half as much as I wanted to. My goodness though, don’t you look different in civilian togs! Say, but I just loved the way you looked on the ship, too, in that old blue uniform; it set you

off in a class by yourself, and there's where you belong."

Mary made a merry interruption seeking to turn aside the flow of personalities but her success was not marked. Looking around him Captain Preston took up his thread with the comment:

"Do you know while I've sat here waiting for you to come down I couldn't help thinking how this place just exactly fits you. To a T. Seems as if, if anybody'd asked me before I came what sort of a place you lived in, I should have gone ahead and described this very house, the way it stands back from the street, and the street, too—that keep-yourself-to-yourself look of it! I knew when I turned the corner you'd live on it."

"Yes, that wouldn't be difficult,

would it? the name being on the lamp-post," laughed Mary.

" Oh, now you're guying me. That isn't what I mean. You understand all right. But those old family portraits—they just find me. I've quite a taste for art myself, also for ancestors. I've got two or three pretty fair ones to my own account. But when it comes to old mahogany I'll confess I'm not in it. This you've got here is out of sight. But somehow a chap like me don't feel uneasy here, it's all so ——" here the Captain hesitated for the first time.

" Unpretentious? "

" Yes, that's it. Now when I ran up to Albany from New York the other day I got in on the other side. It was like this: I saw quite a bit of that Constance Chilton on board, per-

haps you may have noticed it, though I guess you didn't notice much outside your patient. We got rather chummy, to tell the truth, there toward the last. So when I was going to pass through Tarrytown I just thought I'd drop off the train, the same as I have to-day, and make her a call. But it was not for mine! Run right along, son, and mind your own, that's what I said to myself when I got to the gates. They were enough for me—coat of arms, trick lions, all that sort of thing. Why it's a regular nobleman's estate, that Chilton outfit, and as I stood there out rolled a limousine—a Packard *de luxe*—with Miss Chilton herself in the tonneau and two chauffeurs in livery in front. She never saw me, you bet. I caught the next train sure enough," and the Captain shook his head laugh-

ing ruefully at his own discomfiture.

“ I think it meant a great deal for a girl brought up in that fashion to go out as a nurse the way Miss Chilton did,” remarked Mary.

The Captain gave a shrug denoting lukewarm sympathy with the observation, then volunteered the comment:

“ There’s Balfrey, poor old chap, our ‘mysterious Major,’ you remember? I don’t suppose you’ve heard anything more of him since we landed? ”

“ No. Have you? ”

“ Not a word, though I’ve haunted all the officers’ clubs in New York the past week and kept my eyes and ears open. I’d like to know what he’s going in for next. I’ve an idea of my own that he’s somewhere this minute in

dry dock, getting mended up, you know, the way they do."

"They certainly are very successful in that line since the war," Mary responded, then rising she sent word for the family car to be brought to the door.

Having explained her engagement, Mary gladdened the soldier's honest heart by including him in the expedition to the extent of conveying him to the station and speeding him on his way. Thus the Captain departed with a warm sense that he had been a welcome guest, not an intruder. No faintest suspicion rose within him as he travelled on toward his camp, that Dr. Earle, for an appreciable length of time, might have been unable to recall who he was or where she had known him. "That girl is just one peach,"

he reflected, his face touched with unusual gentleness; “ she’s thoroughbred and she’s all business sure enough, but she’s got such a big heart and such a way with her,—puts a fellow at his ease the first minute.”

VI

“YOU AMERICANS DO NOT
COMPREHEND”

MEANWHILE Mary Earle reached the parish house where was held at this hour of this particular afternoon the periodical meeting of the State Board of Foreign Missions, of which Mrs. Lorimer at seventy-five was a still indispensable member. By no means, however, was Mary inclined to venture into the presence of the Board, regarded by her from her childhood as august to a degree. She approached the door of the room wherein she supposed it gathered, but so complete was the silence, no sound coming to her through the

massive, closed doors, that fear seized her lest, being later than she had intended, the meeting had adjourned. Disturbed at the idea of seeming guilty of disregarding the promise to call for her grandmother, Mary softly opened the door. Expecting to find the place empty she took a step across the threshold. A hand reached out even as she would have drawn back, she found herself gently detained, and her grandmother, whose place was just before the door, drew her to a seat near her before she could demur.

“I was wishing that you would come, Mary,” Mrs. Lorimer whispered. “I know you will be interested in what is on the program now. Business took long, but it is just over and this last half hour of the meeting is free to our friends.”

In fact as she spoke an inner door was pushed open and six or eight young women filed quietly into the room and took seats in the background. Looking around her Mary observed with a certain curiosity the score or more of older women seated about the long, polished table which occupied the middle of the committee chamber. Some of them knew and recognized her with a smile of affectionate greeting; others were strangers. All of them, she perceived, were women of character, distinction and serious purpose; certain of them were young; others, like her grandmother, were venerable.

For Mary's further impressions of the occasion, as well as for certain other concerns of hers, we may refer to a letter written that same evening to

her friend, Kate Quimby, in New York.

“Your letter makes me more than ever eager to get back to college,” ran the words. “You will see me some day next week, I think. My family are sweetly reasonable, never think of interfering with my movements, and yet I find myself so loved in this house that it sometimes fairly makes me cry. Also it compensates for the sterner entourage we have left behind. I know you will feel as I do. Life here at home is even dearer than we dreamed it, and yet how quickly you and I would leave it all again if we were to hear the call of desperate need overseas as we did two years ago.

“But to return to the Earles! Really, Kate, as a unit they are to be recommended; you positively must

know them before long and they you. But they are the busiest set you ever encountered and no one of them concerns herself overmuch with the affairs of the others. It occurs to me that, as a family, we keep our interests in water-tight compartments. Nothing much either gets in or out.

“For example, as long as I have known her, my grandmother has held an official position, somewhat conspicuous, in her State Mission Board. I suppose Mother (who is all for missions, you know, as well as for a thousand other things) may talk to Granny at times about her Board matters, but I never heard her. Each goes her own way. For my own part, since I became too big to save pennies in a painted box for the heathen, I have dismissed them practically from my mind.

I never considered the matter definitely anyway, but I believe I had a sense that, with a fraction of Mother and all of Grandmother to look after them, they would do pretty well. I fancy you have been better trained; it seems to me I remember a missionary magazine on your desk last year, you proper child. Perhaps you took the precaution not to read it, though.

“To-day something rather interesting happened. By fair means or otherwise I was smuggled into the Counsels of the Saints, by which I mean into Granny’s most noble Mission Board Meeting and what I heard from a shy and slender woman, a missionary from some (to me) vague part of India, at home ‘on furlough’ has made a strange impression on my mind. Probably this is because said mind is virgin

soil, for it is a fact that I have lived in this Christian family of mine essentially in heathen darkness as far as heathen are concerned. My own fault, of course.

“ But, anyway, it wasn’t what this furloughed saint said so much as what she was. I must tell you, at this point, that Mother has a new hobby, which is that it is *most* important for a woman up to forty-five to preserve in herself a certain something which she calls ‘glamour’ and which she defines as charm but also more than charm, including, if I understand her, a touch of mystery. It is something, my dear, you are hereby warned, which girls who go in for medicine and such like pursuits, do not possess. But that is neither here nor there.

“ To tell the truth I thought dear

Mamma just a trifle ridiculous a week ago when she talked about this quality of glamour, but I was straightway brought to book this very afternoon. For the lady from India *had* it,—but not precisely Mamma's brand. I divined in five minutes her possession of—charm, yet of something far beyond charm. I cannot hope to convey it to you better than Mother conveyed her idea to me. But try to realize, if you can, Katie, dear, this slender, *gracile*, perhaps almost ascetic figure wearing its best, carefully preserved, black taffeta gown with a slight gold chain (which you knew with certainty to have belonged to her dead mother) around a throat as white as any book heroine's and much more modestly concealed than are throats of present day heroines. Then you must note her

hair, quite gray, and gray quite too soon, brushed off severely but fluffing itself out spontaneously to wave near delicately pencilled black eyebrows, the face rather too pale and in general thin and care-worn, the features refined but not remarkable, the whole face dominated by the eyes. There dwelt the *glamour*. Kate, I can't describe them, I can only feel them;—eyes that had faced confusion worse than death, fearlessly though the creature was so frail (and not young like us) among a people (this was taken quite as a matter of course) who are, when in their natural state, half-naked savages capable of any deed of violence you can conceive.

“When she smiled, the light in this woman's eyes seemed to me to have something in it like what I think must be in Christ's eyes—a joy, a pity, an

anguish and a hope unutterable. You see what I try to show you *is* a mystery.

“ Being of a practical turn you will want to know what my furloughed saint discoursed about. There I am rather at a loss. She was an official reporting to those who had sent her, on the institutions which they sustain in a perfectly matter-of-fact fashion. Little touches like the fearsome savages, whose minds she had formerly tutored, were presupposed and had to be sketched in afterwards for me by Granny. I believe she has recently been given an educational post in some semi-civilized Hindu centre; she gave certain statistics of a school, also of a hospital. This last, of course, interested me and I could see it did my furloughed saint also. Her eyes grew larger and more solemn when she spoke

of little native girls in this hospital who at twelve are wives and mothers, and child outcasts of conditions infinitely worse.

“ These conditions were taken by the Board women as altogether familiar, but I knew by the faces of a few outsiders how my own must have changed, ‘ hardened worldling ’ as I felt in that presence. And then the missionary, in answer to questions put by the officers, admitted that *for lack of Christian women physicians* this hospital, the only one anywhere in the region, is now likely to be closed. I almost jumped up and declared that such proceeding would be a crime, but I looked at Granny’s dear old face and saw, under all its seriousness, that this was not a new or unexpected thing. For sweet mercy’s sake, if they are going to open

hospitals, Kate, why don't they see to it that they have doctors to run them? . . . I stop right here, my dear, perceiving my question might be answered in a number of different ways, none particularly gratifying in this twentieth century of the Christian era.

“Afterwards I met the missionary lady a minute, Granny insisted,—and, of course, I put a revised version of this question to her. She made absolutely no answer but I shall not forget, at least not as quickly as I do most things, the shadow on her face as her eyes met mine in a long look. It meant . . . well, it seemed to mean everything in earth and heaven that counts. . . .

“I conclude that all the strong stimuli which we have stressed so much

were not left behind after all when we left France.

“Till we meet again! This is no answer to your letter. Funny, Miss Chilton trying to hunt me up! I heard of her again, this very afternoon, in an unexpected way. It appears that she belongs to that obnoxious class, the very rich, but don't lay that up against her, much as you may be inclined to. I know harmless people of that ilk always irritate you, probably because they are by way of doing so much harm. But Miss Chilton is not really responsible for the fact that her worldly goods are on a large scale or her soul—a little inadequate, shall we say? I like her myself and think we owe her something for taking the trouble to be so pretty.

“I am very pleased that you have

taken the Waverley Place apartment. It sounds most livable. Let's have the net curtains and be really dainty. It's to be our last 'go' as girls, Kate.

“Your Merle.”

“P. S. — What the look in that woman's eyes was like this afternoon, when she did *not* answer my question, I have discovered now. It was the look I met in the faces of the French people when I first went over there when word used to come that our boys wouldn't volunteer in numbers sufficient and the Government would have to resort to conscription. It said simply, *You Americans do not comprehend*. I used to dread to meet it.”

VII

BACHELOR MAIDS AT HOME

THE bachelor-maid apartment inhabited by the two medical students, Mary Earle and Kate Quimby, was situated in a brick house in Waverley Place, not far removed from Washington Square. The windows of this apartment, being on the top floor, looked upon roofs and chimneys, but, at four o'clock of a late March afternoon, gave entrance to sunshine in full flood.

The living-room, with rosy-cretonne-covered wicker chairs, good pictures, many books, bright brasses, stood the search-light of the sun well, being kept, day in, day out, surgically clean by its

indwellers. The high light on the room's blithesomeness at the moment was in the bay-window, where the sun played unhindered upon shining silver and porcelain in brave array on the wide, low tea-table.

The equipment might have seemed to an outsider complete, but in the back of Mary Earle's mind, as she stood talking to a slowly departing guest, lurked an uneasy consciousness that all was not in readiness. This sense was quickened by the manner in which a certain door discreetly moved a few inches at brief intervals. Mary surmised that Kate Quimby hovered behind that door, watching for a chance to come in and put the teakettle over the alcohol lamp. This chance she could hardly have until Mary's guest should depart, not merely threaten to.

The guest was Constance Chilton, and for a half hour she had monopolized Mary's attention. She was exquisitely dressed and prettier than she had been at sea; apparently she was reconciled to life on its present basis although pensive still at moments. Her limousine waited in the street below. She had come hoping to take Mary for a drive in the park; this being declined, since it was Mary's afternoon at home, she was forced to accept disappointment, provisionally, and since she declined to remain for tea, in the end, to leave.

In rushed Kate Quimby then, brass teakettle in hand.

"Is she actually gone at last?" she cried, impatience unconcealed. "Look at the clock, will you? and this water cold, to please you, to start with.

What did Chilton want anyway, Merle? Do for pity's sake get busy and cut those lemons. Some one will be upon us before anything is ready."

"Don't be cross, Katie. I'm not ashamed to cut a lemon before folks, myself. What did she want? Almost anything she couldn't have. To take me to drive, to take me to opera next Saturday, to have me spend a week-end at her house up in Tarrytown."

"Dear, dear! she *is* hard hit, isn't she?" cried Kate disapprovingly. "Is it an honest, out-and-out crush? or is she a dishonest, in-and-in schemer, with her baby mouth and innocent eyes?"

"What nonsense," Mary returned shortly, obviously ill-pleased. "I don't care overmuch for the type, you know very well, but there is no need

of looking upon her with dark suspicion, Kate, or even taking ——”

A tapping of the antique brass knocker on the outer door, announcing the arrival of a visitor, cut Mary short. In twenty minutes an animated group of young women were gathered about the tea-table and with each new arrival and each fresh cup of tea the animation grew. Most of the company were Mary Earle's classmates in medical school. Kate Quimby was one class behind her.

“I wonder if Ilien isn't coming in to-day,” Mary remarked as she drew the last available chair up into the circle. “I quite expected her.”

“Oh, yes, she will be here,” responded a girl called by her friends Leslie, “and Janet Gibson is coming with her. I met them on Twenty-

third Street and Ilien told me she was on her way here but had a little shopping to do first. Isn't she the cleverest thing, Merle?"

Mary nodded but did not smile.

"I can't help thinking how soon we shall lose her,—a year hence she will be on her way back to China," she said soberly.

"Oh, well, 'don't be sorrowful, darling,'" interposed a handsome incisive young woman, more mature than the others; "as far as that goes, we shall all be scattering far and wide in less than three months. I saw a crocus in bloom this morning."

"It's awfully near, but you'll all be in this country, Miss Roberts, except Ilien, won't you?" questioned Kate Quimby.

"I rather expect to go to Servia

under the M. W. N. A.'s War Committee to do after-war work," was the answer, "that is, if I get the appointment."

"It's not very much farther to go on to India," commented Kate. "Why does no one think of that? I judge there is a field for all of us there,—forty million secluded women, they say, who cannot be medically treated by the brethren."

"India? Where did you learn so much of India, *mon enfant?*" a plump, dark-eyed girl inquired with a merry but slightly derisive laugh. "It is not exactly alluring, is it? God's country for me, at least."

"Oh, Betty, I wish you wouldn't ——" here Mary Earle broke off. Manifestly she had been startled by Kate's unlooked-for challenge.

“Wouldn’t what?”

“Speak as if we were favourite, not fortunate. Never mind, dear. Say it, if you like—excuse me! You mean to go in for Baby Hygiene, don’t you, Betty?”

“No, I have given that up. There is a really fine opening in Mottville, and I have decided on that. It’s a factory town and that is best for a quick start. And there are only sixty doctors in the place, counting osteopaths.”

“What is the population?” asked Miss Roberts.

“Somewhere around fifty thousand, I think.”

“I wish I knew what I was going to do,” remarked a girl called Bertha, conspicuous for intelligence rather than personal attractiveness. “I guess I

shall take up laboratory work of some kind. I'm perfectly sure I shall never make a success as a practitioner. I haven't the right way with me."

"Nonsense!" declared Betty. "No one makes a success for years in general practice, except in a factory town. I think the more attractive you are the less they want you. For my part I wish there were about half as many doctors as there are in the United States."

"Of course there are some girls who have unusual qualifications of some kind," put in Leslie soberly. "For them it is different."

"Yes, like Merle," added Bertha wistfully.

"Oh, Merle!" was called in chorus.

"Of course she's in a class by herself," the theme was elaborated by

Miss Roberts. "She has not only her nurse's training but her father's reputation to inherit and her brother's practice to step into, ready-made for her. Few have both a pull and a partner like you, Dr. Earle."

"Yes, and you have your own home to live in too," added Betty, "instead of a garret somewhere and 'mealing out.' And then all this is only the beginning."

"Of course it is." Bertha, who had been trying hard to be heard, now resolutely bore down the other voices. "It was I who brought Merle in—I don't care whether she likes it or not, I judge not—but I wasn't thinking for a moment of these . . ."

"Meretricious advantages?" Kate Quimby interjected as the speaker hesitated. Ignoring the general laugh

Bertha persisted, saying with emphasis:

“It is what Merle has done over in France, her record, her work, most of all herself ——”

To Mary Earle's relief the telephone rang just then and she was able to extricate herself from the toils of talk which had taken a turn little pleasing to her. Hurrying into a small passage and closing the door firmly behind her, she took down the telephone receiver. A man's voice, with marked distinctness, asked to speak to Dr. Mary Earle. Then, finding it was she who had answered the call, the voice said:

“Miss Earle, would it be possible for you to come to the Woman's Medical College Hospital? You are needed at once.”

“I can come at once.”

“Thank you. Good-bye.” The speaker rang off. Mary proceeded without delay to dress for the street. In five minutes she reëntered the living-room and when she could make herself heard above the tumult of discussion she excused herself to her friends, saying there had been an emergency call from the hospital. As she closed the door voices were raised in lively exclamations.

“Wouldn’t you know Merle would be the one to get the call!”

“She is the fashion already.”

“She has the hospital staff at her feet just as she has us.”

* * * * * * *

When Mary reached the hospital she was met by a message from Miss Gibson, the head nurse, asking her to come to a certain private room in the

long annex. Asking no questions Mary hastened thither, prescience of ill quickening her steps. Miss Gibson surely had been on her way to Waverley Place with Ilien Siu an hour or two ago. What had happened?

The two met in a small ante-room, but only for a moment.

“Yes. It is Ilien,” Miss Gibson said, her face very grave. “I can’t tell you about it now. She was struck down by an automobile while we were on our way to you; we fear she is badly hurt internally. The doctor has to make an examination, but Ilien will not permit it until you are here to give her the ether.”

Mary did not speak, had not spoken; there was no need. Without an instant’s delay she followed the nurse into the adjoining room where she

found lying on the narrow hospital bed the young Chinese girl student she had learned to know and love. Ilien Siu smiled when she saw Mary as if with a sense of sudden comfort and relief, then held out one hand, tiny and dimpled like a child's. She looked singularly unchanged, Mary reflected; perhaps the situation was not to be tragic after all.

The physician, who stood a little apart, his watch in his hand, Mary vaguely realized was unfamiliar in the hospital, being in the uniform of a British medical officer. This did not surprise her, nor was she surprised when Ilien with brightening eyes said simply, glancing in his direction:

“Dr. Earle, this is Dr. Balfrey; he is an honoured friend of mine. He says he will join you in the care of me.”

The fact that Mary recognized then “the mysterious Major” of the *Cumberland*, of whom she had more than once had sight before the end of the voyage, seemed then a matter of the smallest possible consequence.

VIII

CONCERNING ILIEN SIU

IT was after midnight when Mary Earle, white and spent, dragged herself up the long flights of stairs in the apartment house, the elevator being off duty, and let herself in quietly at her own door.

The living-room was lighted by a single, shaded electric bulb. Kate Quimby, who had been dozing in her padded kimono, came to meet her, removed her hat and cloak, made her sit down in the armchair from which she had risen, and, before either had spoken a word, placed a cup of steaming hot milk on a tabouret by her side. Mary looked up, response in her eyes.

“Good girl,” she murmured with a little twisted smile, then drank the milk with due appreciation, Kate watching her the while, with maternal eyes.

“Now I can find my voice, Katie,” Mary began, leaning back and stretching out her long arms in an expressive gesture. “I was so sorry not to telephone you but there was not a minute for it. It was Ilien Siu.”

“Mary!” Kate exclaimed, dismayed.

“Yes, she was run down about four o’clock by an automobile at the corner of Broadway and Twenty-third Street. The spine is desperately injured.”

Mary spoke quietly but her face was pain-drawn and haggard.

“Do you know how it happened? Was she alone?”

“Janet Gibson was with her. They

were coming here, you know. Janet told me something about it; it is very strange. They started to cross the street, not precisely together, but each for herself at the same moment. Janet lost Ilien from view for a little after she herself had reached the opposite sidewalk. When she caught sight of her again, to her horror she saw that the child had stopped short about half-way across, her eyes fixed, Janet thought, on a man in khaki who had just passed her and whose appearance startled her. Then the traffic closed between them. When it cleared a little there was shouting and confusion and Ilien was being carried by two policemen almost directly past where Janet stood."

"How very dreadful," groaned Kate.

Mary was silent for a little, then continued:

“Janet directed everything, that is the only consolation. They took her into a shop. Ilien was conscious and as unperturbed as she always is,—that Oriental submissiveness of hers stands her in good stead now.”

“Is there any hope?”

Mary shook her head doubtfully, her eyes downcast.

“It is not fully determined,” she continued a moment later. “The case is not chiefly in charge of the hospital surgeons. This officer, the sight of whom startled Ilien when she was crossing the street, it seems, was a doctor whom she had known and worked with two or three years ago in Chinatown. She was herself doing nursing there that summer. Poor little thing,

how brave she has been, and how little we have cared to enter into her struggles, Kate,” and for the first time Mary’s voice broke. “Well,” she began again, “Ilien loved this doctor because he was very good to her people in their poverty and helplessness, but she had seen nothing of him for a long time. As far as I can gather the sudden, unexpected recognition startled her so that she lost the sense of her danger for just those few seconds. It is a terrible crossing.”

“I suppose this doctor never knew ——”

“Oh, yes. It had been observed that he wore the caduceus . . .” Mary hesitated, Kate fancied seeming a little confused. “Ilien, as I said, was conscious and her first words to Janet, there in the shop where they

took her, were that some one follow this man and bring him to her. She knew, you see, that he would come. In fact, I think he was already bent in that direction, a doctor being called for. He helped Janet to bring Ilien in the ambulance to our hospital, and I think on the way he gave her his promise that he would take care of her."

"That won't make any difficulty, I hope, with our hospital doctors?"

Mary was silent.

"You didn't know this man?" asked Kate.

"I know him now. He brought me home."

"Good for him. Do you like him? Do you think he will do as well as our own . . .?"

Mary had risen now to prepare for

bed. Kate, realizing anew her weariness, exclaimed:

“ You poor love, I won’t ask you another question.”

“ I will tell you about the doctor tomorrow. I really am too tired now, Kate. He is all right. But I’ll answer the questions I know you must have answered to-night.”

Standing in her chamber doorway Mary then summed up briefly the tale of Ilien’s injuries and of the tentative prognosis. The girl might live a fortnight, even longer, but there was little hope of recovery. This Ilien herself, naturally, did not now know.

IX

CONSCRIPTION

“**T**HEN we agree, Dr. Earle, on the treatment to be followed? You are as convinced as I that it would be useless to operate farther?”

It was Dr. Minot Balfrey who spoke. Mary gave sorrowful assent. Several days had elapsed since Ilien Siu had suffered her accident. They two were seated in the office of one of the hospital surgeons, who, having shared in the consultation just closed, had excused herself, begging them to use the office freely.

As question and comment concern-

ing the case followed, a desultory thought or two strayed through Mary's consciousness;—she need have had no misgiving lest the hospital staff would look with disfavour upon Major Balfrey's entrance upon their domain. It was Ilien's right to choose him, but more than that, it was obvious now that his coming into a certain relation with the local staff was counted an enviable honour. For plainly this man was hard pressed by many who would gladly have lionized him as a war hero of high distinction. Mary was able to sit thus vis-à-vis with the Major (he was still most often given his military title) without discomfort for him, for herself. She was convinced now that Captain Preston's surmise was well founded; some reconstruction of the marred visage had

taken place, rendering it by no means normal, but by no means repulsive. The eyes were spared; but in them lurked a sadness unchanging even when he smiled. These considerations faded quickly from Mary's mind, for now the Major was speaking of the mournful waste, as it seemed, of the little Chinese student's valorous struggle to gain her profession.

Some note of complete finality in his words gave Mary a sharp contraction of heart.

He answered the appeal in her eyes only by a significant motion of his hand.

"I think she wishes to have some private talk with you, Dr. Earle," he said. "There seems to me no reason why you should fend it off; let her talk, not just now perhaps, but by and by.

It will do no harm. I can see that the child has a heavy load on her heart."

"She knows?" Mary murmured; the question was not easy to ask.

"Yes, I could not evade her question, although this should have been for you to do. It is a tremendous problem, China,—is it not?" he continued, seeking perhaps the aid of the impersonal. "When you consider that a fourth of our race are Chinese and that to-day only about six men in a hundred in China, and one woman in a thousand, can even read, it gives us pause in our glorification of human progress. Common sense would seem to suggest practical measures of uplift over there."

"I sometimes wonder," said Mary slowly, "if now, after the war, there will not develop among us at least some slight sense of world responsibil-

ity. Even toward China," with which she rose. The consultation was plainly over.

Major Balfrey rose also and turned, looking abstractedly from the window. As he stood thus no mark of the havoc wrought in his face by shell-fire was visible; Mary suddenly perceived the strength and nobility of his face and head. Something of unconscious command in his bearing caused the soldierly element in the man to predominate over the professional, she thought. The wicked wreck of his native harmony of physique smote her as it had not before and her breath quickened.

"'Even toward China,'" he repeated. "Yes, it is easier to give ourselves body and soul for Europe than for Asia, is it not? The human kinship is closer. I am inclined to think

that only the missionary temperament is sufficiently gifted with imagination to enter into vital sympathy with Orientals."

Mary was now at the office door.

"We hardly look upon missionaries and those who send them as highly imaginative, do we?" she turned to say. "Do you really think there is a missionary temperament?"

"Why, yes. I think so," Major Balfrey replied reflectively. "The man of that temperament, or the woman, volunteers, you know, from youth up, so to speak. It is in the blood."

"There are others, I suppose," said Mary, "who have not the volunteers' vision but become conscripts under orders from conscience."

"Conscripts of conscience," re-

peated the Major. "Where have I heard that phrase? It is a good one."

"I have noticed it in a poem by Percy McKaye. Good-morning," and the door closed on Mary.

X

A SUPREME CHALLENGE

A WEEK had passed. Mary Earle sat beside Ilien Siu's bed in the narrow hospital chamber which was irradiated with light of the setting sun. The figure outlined beneath the counterpane had shrunk to what seemed the proportions of a child. The face once rounded and blooming was sunken, the features sharpened, the eyes abnormally large. Still the smile with which Ilien gazed in Mary's face was of piercing sweetness and there was only weakness, not agitation, in her voice when she spoke.

"The others call you Merle, may I also?" she asked.

“ I want you to. You are very dear to me.”

“ You are kind and you speak truth, —you and Dr. Balfrey. You cannot know how good a man he is; you have not seen him, as I have, in the very, very hot summer, working day and night among the Chinese, down in the worst parts of New York. He is one of the Jesus Christ men, Merle.”

Mary smiled and touched tenderly the soft black cloud of hair above Ilien’s brow.

“ What a beautiful thing to say of any one,” she said. “ What is it you want to find, Ilien? Can I help? ”

“ It is only this; I have it now.” As she spoke the girl drew from under her pillow a tiny folded leaflet.

“ I have three things, or four, to give you, Merle,” she said softly, “ but this

is the best. It is truer than the gold of my chain which you will wear for me, and clearer than the topaz, the charm which hangs from it. This is the very truth about us," saying which she slipped the leaflet into Mary's hand. "This is the way we think and live in China, the best of us."

Mary glanced at a title on the narrow sheet, *It need not have been*, and the author's name,—that of a woman physician. A heart-sickening pang smote her. Why had not she, Mary Earle, known how to write a thing like that? Why had she never until this hour concerned herself vitally with her friend's heroic purpose, with what lay behind it? The passion of grief and remorse, albeit kept in strong control, swayed her soul inwardly.

"I shall read it and always keep it,

Ilien," she said, and her voice did not tremble.

Again the smile, but it passed quickly and for a moment Ilien's eyes were fastened on Mary's face in a sudden mortal appeal.

"Merle, I have something I must say," Ilien's voice was as if she were now in breathless haste. "If it is wrong you will forgive. . . . You know how I have thought of nothing, day or night, all these years but being ready to go back and help my people. . . . But that is over. . . . I cannot. . . . You, oh Merle, you do not know what our women . . . our little children suffer . . . we have not talked of that before . . . but now . . . is it too late? . . ."

Mary, watching the white face, not-

ing the fluttering breath, keeping her finger on the pulse, bent her head.

“ You can talk a little more, dear, do not hurry so. . . . We have time ” . . . to herself she added, “ a very little time, now.”

Ilien’s face relaxed to its wonted passive calm.

“ That is good,” she murmured. “ They suffer more than is human to suffer, — our poor people. . . . Our doctors know only sorcerer’s craft, not mercy, not science. Our little babies die fast, Merle . . . seventy in each hundred. Our women are tortured, yes, terribly tortured . . . and so few Christian doctors come. . . . Here you have between two streets perhaps ten,—perhaps twenty. With us there is often, for two million people,—yes, more than that—one

doctor. . . . I see by your face, Merle, that you believe me; you comprehend now what it must be that I can, after all, help nothing."

Mary nodded; this time words would not come. There was a silence, and then, like the voice of a third person Mary heard her own voice. It was asking,—

"What can I do, Ilien?"

The answer came direct with death's own urgency.

"You can go for me, in Christ's name. You are ready now. I had still a year. There will then be gain, not loss."

Mary took both the pale hands in hers and looked down into the face, meeting its poignant appeal full and steadily.

"Yes, dear Ilien. You can trust

me. I am ready. I shall go in your place and do my best. I am your substitute, God helping me."

The smile which flickered over the parted lips, at first incredulous, was a heavenly radiance when it had reached the eyes. The moment, supreme to both, passed. Ilien, satisfied, turned her head on the pillow, murmured, "God bless you, now I can rest," then, exhausted, her hands folded on her breast, her eyelids dropped and she fell asleep.

XI

A MESSAGE FROM THE SHADOW

“**D**R. EARLE, may I take you home?”

Mary, having reached the outer door of the hospital, was surprised to hear Major Balfrey's voice behind her. It was six o'clock in the morning; she was homeward bound, having kept the vigil in Ilien's chamber since ten the previous night, alone save for Janet Gibson who had joined her there at intervals.

“You see I have a message to deliver to you which is really imperative,” the Major added seriously, as, noting

her assent, he went forward to open the door of his car which stood waiting. In another moment they were moving forward slowly, headed for Washington Square.

"Was there any change during the night? Did she give any sign of consciousness while you were with her?" he asked.

Mary shook her head, saying, "None. I think there will be none after this."

"I am sure of it," he rejoined. "She will scarcely last the day out."

"You spoke of a message ——"

"Yes. It is from Ilien herself to you. I spent an hour with her, you know, last evening, while you were resting."

"She was awake then—conscious?"

"Yes, much of the time."

“Was she satisfied . . . at rest?” Mary asked the question with intense anxiety.

“Perfectly so, except on one single point. . . . Her strong common sense was at work, Doctor, to the last conscious minute. She told me with remarkable clearness, and with a joy which I found affecting, of your promise earlier in the day that you would go to China as a medical missionary in her place. But she had one misgiving and very naturally so. She felt that in her explicit challenge to you to go to China she had taken an unfair advantage of you at an emotional crisis—of your sympathy, your affection for her, your conscientiousness. It cannot be denied that this is true in some sense ——”

“You did not let Ilien think a thing

like that!" cried Mary in sharp dismay.

"No. I simply received her message to you; it was, that neither she nor God,—this is as she expressed it,—would hold you to any promise if not made willingly, and according to your best judgment and afterthought."

"And now I can never reassure her! Oh, Major Balfrey, why did I leave her for one single moment?" At last Mary's stress of feeling had its way.

"Please do not allow yourself to grieve on that score; there is no need. She was perfectly reassured."

"How? How could she have been?"

"I told her that I knew you had made your promise with a full sense of all that is involved in renunciation here

and all of deprivation and difficulty in the field, but that I knew of certainty that it was made freely and gladly, that I even knew that you had already, before this, contemplated such a step."

Receiving no word of response, Major Balfrey turned his head, glancing at Mary. To his surprise her eyes seemed to flood him with the light of her wordless gratitude. He took her hand in his, but said nothing; in his face was the reverence a man shows as he approaches things divine. Releasing her hand he broke the tension with a low laugh, saying:

"Of course I did not actually know all this but—you see—I knew *you*. Essentially I knew it must be true."

"It is true, perfectly true," Mary rejoined. "I could not have given my

promise on the instant if my mind had not been in preparation for just that challenge. It was all I needed to make my way clear."

"Still, Dr. Earle, I am not ready by any means to say unqualifiedly that I would think you justified in carrying out a purpose entered into under such stress. I should advise at least a few years' delay. . . ."

"I hardly think you would, Major Balfrey, if it were your own case," Mary broke in. "Did you take a few years to consider the call to go to France? You went over, I believe, before we entered the war."

"We appear to have been equally precipitate, I admit, there; at least I judge we must have gone overseas about the same time,—you working with the French, I with the British

forces. But, you see, that situation called for impulsive action."

Mary was silent, not disposed to argument, the less because she had an undefined sense that Major Balfrey was not speaking now from real conviction.

However, after a little she commented:

"If anything ever called for what you describe as impulsive action it would seem to me to be the situation in China as Ilien knows it. If it is impulsive to begin trying to help over there after we have looked on calmly all these centuries, then, for Heaven's own sake, let us be impulsive!"

The Doctor listened closely but made no direct reply.

"Then you are actually planning to go to China to practice medicine?"

The question came as they turned into Waverley Place.

“If the Board will send me—next Autumn. Of course I may not be found eligible.”

“I should be under the painful necessity myself of recommending you, as far as the professional side is concerned, if the Board appealed to me.”

The car stopped. Mary sprang to the pavement, paused there to thank Major Balfrey and to say good-bye. Her face, which had been wan with watching and grief, now grown young again and her cheeks rose-red.

XII

MARCHING ORDERS

“**Y**OU could not have done otherwise, Merle; it is the right thing, the only reconciling thing.”

It was evening; the quiet room was dusky; the windows, opened wide, let in the fresh Spring air. Mary Earle lay on a low divan; Kate Quimby, who had just spoken, sat beside her. They were, as they wished to be, alone.

“The only reconciling thing,” Mary repeated the words softly, under her breath, then they were silent. She had returned at an early hour that morning to her post in the hospital; there

she had remained within the shadow of death until four o'clock, when Ilien's flickering breath was quenched. Now she had had time, at last, to speak with her good comrade Kate of that which had entered in to change her own outlook on life by way of Ilien's tragic defeat.

Kate broke the silence which followed the repetition of her own words, saying quietly:

"You cannot guess all that this means to me. Now, Merle, I have courage to tell you that my mind is made up to go to India, myself, next year, after I get my diploma."

"Can you be in earnest? It is so sudden—so startling somehow."

"Not as sudden as you think and it is your own doing, anyway, in part. But I can't say that any credit goes

to you, Merle, on that account. I think, at the time, you had never thought of Foreign Missions except as something people's grandmothers occupied themselves with."

"I have certainly been innocent of any exalted designs in your direction," and Mary smiled a little. "Please disclose when and how I had this extraordinary influence upon you."

"You wrote me a long letter just after we came back from France; in it you described—pretty well, too, Merle—a 'furloughed saint' from India whom you met at a missionary meeting."

"I remember her perfectly; it would be impossible to forget her. Was I unconsciously sowing good seed then in my Katie's mind? I truly had never realized the situation myself at

all until that day. It has worked in me ever since."

"Very well. Your missionary from India told of the closing of a woman's hospital, over there, the only one in some wide region, for lack of doctors, and you said, 'For sweet mercy's sake, if they are going to open hospitals, why don't they see to it that they have doctors to run them?' Of course you brought yourself up standing as soon as you framed the question."

"Obviously if women don't volunteer as missionary physicians it would be difficult to obtain them, would it not?" interjected Mary.

"Now I have always read and heard more than you seem to have, about conditions in China and India; I had known some missionaries and yet,—really it seems all the less excusable—

it had never once occurred to me as a possibility, until I read that letter of yours, Merle, that I could go myself."

"And you began to think about it then?"

"Rather casually at first. I can't say that I was keen about welcoming the notion, but the pressure of the awful lack of sane medical practice in India took possession of me."

"I remember, Kate, the day that Ilien was run down, when the girls were here chattering about what they should do after we graduate, where to settle, how to get their kites up and all that, that you said something about India."

"It was that night that I decided the question, while I was alone here. There was something so—bizarre, positively—in sensible, intelligent, trained

Christian women hunting everywhere for a place to practice medicine where there were not too many rival doctors already on the spot, here at home, and utterly ignoring those vast, uncared-for populations in the Orient where they are so mortally needed. The lack of all human proportion in the situation, the sheer disregarding of Christ's will that His disciples go out to succour and redeem all nations smote full upon me. For is not the question for us, if we are Christian, not where we can gain most, but where we are needed most? It seemed perfectly clear to me, and the matter settled itself then and there. That is, supposing I am the kind of a girl they want."

"But Kate, why haven't you told me before?"

"How could I? Think what these

weeks have been for you. And then too, I couldn't dream that you would see it quite as I did. I dreaded trying to explain."

"You would. But do you see how with both of us we can find our way now to go on this strange, new adventure in Christ's name without much hesitation because of having once heard and answered marching orders, when we volunteered to go overseas? It simplifies, doesn't it? Really that was in many ways harder,—it was surely harder for our families, there being actual personal peril for us to meet. The separation from home was as complete and bade fair to last as long—for you know we enlist for China and India only for a seven or even five year term. But that appeal was hardly made before we volun-

teered to go. It was a matter of course."

"Oh, Merle, what if Christian men and women in this country some day respond to Christ's call to minister to the needs of the world like that,—no heroics, just as a matter of course!"

Mary had left the divan; she stood now in the window, overlooking the sea of roofs with lights everywhere like constellations seen through a delicate haze.

For a long time neither spoke. Then Mary said, musingly, coming back to the present:

"To-morrow is another day, and on the third day Ilien will be buried. Then life begins again—but not life on the old terms. Ilien is not dead; it is for me to make her live on."

After another pause Kate said:

“ You have had no time yet to let the Springfield people know, naturally.”

“ Not yet. That does not intimidate me. They will take it like the true souls they are, as they did before. But I have no end of things to think of, Kate.”

“ One of them is Constance Chilton. She is on your trail.”

“ Oh dear! I had forgotten her existence.”

“ She has by no means forgotten yours. She was here to-day and wanted to come again to-morrow but I put her off. She seems to have something serious on her mind.”

“ I suppose that is possible.”

XIII

HONOURS

MAY was nearly over and the splendour of June in the air. The annual meeting of an eminent Medical Association, convened for several days in New York, was nearing its close.

In the morning session of this, the last day of the conference, Mary Earle, coming into the hall alone, late, by a side entrance, slipped unnoticed into a vacant seat. Miscellaneous business, she found, was the order of the hour. Mary felt a touch of disappointment that nothing of vital inter-

est to her seemed to have place on the program. Her days were crowded now, graduation being near at hand; she had missed the earlier sessions and even now had come for personal rather than professional reasons.

Then her interest quickened, even her pulse, perhaps, for a member rose and made a distinctly enthusiastic little speech, close beside her. In this speech he declared that, inasmuch as one of their number had been signally honoured recently, it was in order that an expression of congratulation be recorded. The speaker alluded not chiefly, he said, to the fact that Dr. Minot Balfrey had received the Medal of Honour from the United States Government, for distinguished service in the field in performance of aid to the wounded, but that he had been invited

within a short time by the French Government to return to France in order to coöperate with eminent French surgeons in measures for treatment of bone tuberculosis, a serious feature of that disease now a dark menace to the French nation.

“How splendid!” thought Mary, feeling in her surprise at so much interesting news gladder than she had any “call” to, as the recommendation was put into effect. It was in fact in the hope of seeing Major Balfrey that she was here at the present moment, although not in the least for her own sake.

Then she heard the Major’s own voice and realized that she had not come in vain. He could not engage, he said, in this work in France permanently, other concerns making even

stronger demands upon him, but it was his purpose to sail at once for France and give himself to this emergency work for a year at least.

As the Major stood to speak Mary saw him, his place being unexpectedly near her; she noted, as he turned in her direction, the old, unchanging sadness in his eyes, the absence of all elation in his voice. In another moment she was surprised to see him start to leave the hall. Instantly she left also. Now was perhaps her only time, for she must see him—that she had promised. What if it were in her power, this very day, to change that look in his eyes, to bring human hope and joy back into his life?

By fleetness of foot and by use of the side entrance Mary was able to intercept the Major as he left the

building. Seeing her at his elbow, breathless, unwontedly excited, he exclaimed:

“What incomparable good fortune is this! Dr. Mary Earle actually running after me!”

“I haven’t a doubt,” Mary replied, walking on rapidly beside him, “that you are bent at this minute on doing your best to escape bores like me.”

“I am certainly trying to escape the well-meant attentions of my brethren,” was the rejoinder, “but as for bores like you—well, that’s another story.”

“You can’t escape me anyway, so we won’t waste time on that. I have an important reason for seeing you. Now, Major Balfrey, seriously, can you give me a few minutes in which we can talk quietly?”

“You speak, my dear young friend,

like a reporter. I am now familiar with their method. There is nothing on earth I would rather do, believe me, but, Dr. Earle, to do it I must go on escaping! Medical men of all shades will be after me for—pulls—to put it brutally, of course for congratulations, too, all that sort of thing. To be quite clear, I am at this moment fleeing for my life. Can you hide me successfully? If you could arrange luncheon for instance—in seclusion? If so I shall be only too happy to talk with you quietly for hours together.”

Laughing and still hurrying on, Mary considered. They had reached Broadway; clocks were striking a quarter to twelve.

“I can hide you!” she cried. “Follow me to a place of safety! Don’t you feel as if we were in a movie?”

With this she led the way down a numbered street to a staircase which they climbed and which brought them to the entrance of a small and recherché tea room.

“No one comes here at this time of day. You can breathe freely now, my friend.”

Laughing merrily at their little by-play, they seated themselves at a small table in an airy alcove, ordered such luncheon as the place provided, thus initiating the threatened interview.

“First of all,” Mary began, “you are not yet at the end of your troubles, Major Balfrey. You are now at my mercy. Have I thus far bored you with congratulations?”

“Indeed you have not;” the Major spoke with slight asperity. “I have felt your silence keenly.”

“Not until half an hour ago have I heard a word of these honours which are falling thick and fast upon your head. Why have you not informed me of them?”

“There was something about it in the papers,” he said, frowning.

“Do I have time to read papers?” she cried. “Please realize that I am getting ready for graduation—it is only two weeks off.”

“Ah, I see. Unluckily for myself I have never been able to devise measures by which I could gain personal admission to your presence, not having been invited to visit your house. You could hardly have looked for me to send you announcement ——”

“Hardly!” Mary interrupted, then stretched out her hand, her face beaming with unfeigned pleasure. “I am

perfectly delighted that you have received such recognition, Dr. Balfrey, that you are going in for such splendid service. My congratulations."

"My thanks—they are honest to match."

"When do you sail?"

"Day after to-morrow."

For a while their talk was of the work in France, the necessitous and dreadful conditions, the demand for reconstruction in the habits of life of the people, and the like, then of the Major's interesting prospect of collaboration with French surgeons. But at last, perceiving that he was not minded to hold the conversation over long on himself, Mary, with a little toss of her head, declared that Major Balfrey was by no means to imagine that she envied him.

“ I have honours and opportunities myself, if you please,” was her challenge.

“ I have not the slightest doubt of that,” he answered; “ *Cum laude* for your diploma—that goes without saying ——”

“ Something better than that,” Mary broke in, flushing high; “ here it is, right in my pocket,” and opening a small leather bag which lay beside her she took out a letter and laid it before her companion.

“ Am I to read it?” he asked gravely.

“ You can, but I am afraid you are not interested enough for that. Simply, it is, in effect, my commission from our Mission Board to go out to China in September, there to engage as a Christian missionary in the prac-

tice of Christian medicine and surgery."

"My honours, so called, are small beside that, Dr. Earle," the Major said gently, handing her back the letter. "Perhaps only you and I, being together as we were in caring for Ilien Siu, can comprehend the full significance of this commission. I am glad your way to go to China is clear."

Mary's eyes gave her response.

"How about your family?" Major Balfrey asked, presently. "This must have a painful side for them, I am sure, as well as for you."

"They are made of the right stuff, if I do say so," Mary replied. "Of course it is not precisely easy for any of us. I sent them word of my change of plan the week that Ilien died. The next morning I received a telegram from

my really illustrious grandmother, a message of just two Latin words: *Nunc Dimittis.*”

“Now that was good, very good,” responded Balfrey.

“My mother wired, too, saying that if I am to practise medicine she considers China preferable to America—that sounds as if she felt it better to have me out of sight. That really isn’t her point of view; she meant exactly what she said. My brother wrote me a rather humorous letter, with a serious touch, though. The gist of it was: if a good time of life is what you’re after, stay here; if it’s service of fellow-men, China is all right.”

“Very well put, and true enough in a way,” commented the Major thoughtfully, “but I haven’t a doubt that a ‘good time of life’ would also

be your portion, Mary Earle,—if you'll excuse my leaving off the title this once—were you to be in Labrador or Madagascar or China. 'The mind is its own place.' Perhaps you have heard that mentioned before."

Mary smiled happily and turned to receive the maid entering at the moment with a tray containing enticing service of luncheon for two.

XIV

A CRITICAL COMMISSION

THE sun streamed through a row of pink and white tulips set in the alcove window; the white curtains billowed back and forth in the breeze; fragrance from a jar of mignonette on the sill was wafted about the two who sat to break bread together as if they had been friends of long standing.

Uppermost in Mary's mind, however, was the sense that she really hardly knew this man facing her now at short range; that, like a craven coward, she shrank from intruding upon his personal life in pursuance of

her commission. Moreover, the spur which her courage had received from the melancholy, never before, she thought, absent from his eyes, failed her now. Something of buoyancy in his mood seemed to have touched even that haunting shadow; for the moment it had vanished. None the less she had given her word to do this thing and must not falter.

“Major Balfrey, may I talk with you of my friend, Constance Chilton?” she began valiantly enough as she perceived the Major’s interest in strawberries flagging.

Surprise was distinctly perceptible.

“Most certainly,” was the answer, “but it is strange to find that you know each other.”

“I met her on the *Cumberland*

when we crossed, you know, or perhaps ——”

“Yes, it is true. I did know later that she was on the ship, but not at the time. That was on the whole fortunate, perhaps.”

In her heart Mary thanked the Major for this opening. Quick in the up-take, she remarked:

“You will not, I am sure, take it ill of me if I am so bold as to let you know that Miss Chilton confided in me on shipboard the story of the very sad affair . . .” Mary hesitated, then advanced again to the attack, the Major showing no disposition to give further openings. “I was convinced of her very real distress of mind, Major Balfrey, and of the sincerity of her regard for you.”

He bent his head in acknowledgment

of her statement, a plait of perplexity between his brows, but he did not speak.

“ Her sense of duty in severing your relations, however mistaken it may now seem, struck me as honest.”

“ I see,” commented the Major dispassionately. “ Miss Chilton is a very charming girl.”

Some quality in this comment seemed to augur ill for Mary’s errand. Goaded to action she plunged resolutely ahead.

“ Yes, she is a charming girl, but she is also a brave girl, brave enough to dare to do the unusual ——”

“ Why is she not brave enough to speak for herself instead of laying upon you an uncongenial task? ”

“ I do not blame her for that, Major Balfrey. Any sensitive girl would

shrink from herself approaching,—in her own behalf—a man ——”

“A man whom she had once promptly—released—so to speak, for reasons sufficiently obvious, no doubt. Yes, Mary Earle, I agree with you on that entirely, and we must not allow the charming Miss Chilton to approach such a *faux pas* by the twentieth part of one poor scruple.”

Mary was silent in her turn. Obviously the initiative had passed to the Major. He did not appear to find it embarrassing.

“Let me help you. Miss Chilton has been, we will say, so brave, or so unusual, as to ask you to mediate between herself and me with a view to restored relations.”

A pause, but no comment.

“But thus far you have not carried

out her commission, have not stated her position, finding it not altogether easy. That is right. Now, I have known Miss Chilton longer than you have; probably I know the reactions of her temperament better. For her own sake you must refrain from performing her errand in order to save her from inevitable awkwardness. If Miss Chilton knew the future to which I stand committed she would necessarily have to beat a second retreat."

"But indeed, Major Balfrey, I think there you are mistaken. Although she did not mention it to me, I can see now, looking back at this last conversation with her, that Miss Chilton must have known then of your being called to go to France. I do not think that would cause her the slightest hesitation."

“Very true. How about China? I am going to China, Dr. Earle, when I have done a year’s work in France.”

Mary was blankly astonished.

“As an investigator?” she asked.

“On the Rockefeller Foundation?”

“Not in the very least,” was the quick response.

“Under the Red Cross?”

“Under the Cross of Christ. There is for me no other name. If they will take me I am to go out, just as you are going now, as a medical missionary. I have worked more or less among the Chinese in this city and have become strongly interested in them, have got a little hold on their language. There is real character foundation there to build upon. But China needs the Christian religion more than she needs modern medicine—and that is a good

deal to say. I should not care to go on a simply scientific or humanitarian basis."

Before Major Balfrey had finished speaking Mary had definitely withdrawn Constance Chilton from the running. There was nothing more for her to say on that head. But a few words still belonged to the Major.

"And so we will save Miss Chilton from all further embarrassment by letting you report to her that you learned, before committing yourself in this regard, that I was pledged to go to China, after a year or so in France, as a missionary, and that learning this you felt it wiser not to proceed further. She will be very grateful to you. So shall I, Mary Earle. But I am grateful to you for very much higher service than this. Until I met you I

did not quite know how divine a thing a woman may become when her life is inspired by the love of Christ."

As he spoke with a solemnity she had not known in him hitherto, Minot Balfrey's face showed the reality of his homage.

"I have much to thank you for," he continued. "You have helped me to become, like yourself, a conscript of conscience. Surely if the war has taught us anything,—and if it has not, we are incapable of learning, it is that life is given us not for self-gain, self-pleasing, self-ministration, but for service. The question for a mature Christian man or woman becomes simply, where is the need greatest for the kind of service I can render?"

"And looking into this question you have found China the answer?" asked

Mary, finding voice at length. "It might almost seem as if you ought to remain on in France on this tuberculosis commission. You can do so much."

"There is, of course," he answered seriously, "a prodigious work to be done in France and I am glad to have a part, if only a very small one, in that. It is possible I may find it best to remain beyond the year I have set for myself, but I think not."

"My heart aches for France."

"Yes, France appeals to us poignantly because we see her ravaged to the verge of apparent peril of sinking from a high plane of national life to a lower. This peril is not, I believe, a real one. France has wonderful resiliency, she will spring back to her proper level as tempered steel will

spring after compression. The case is wholly different with China. There is a non-Christian nation which has never risen to a high plane of human life, but beholds it from afar and reaches out for it. The disaster, should the Church of Christ fail to go to her aid now and help her up to the higher plane, would be enormous."

"Yes, it would be too dreadful to think of," Mary echoed, then, with emotion added, "How I wish Ilien could have known that you are to go and work among her people, Major Balfrey."

"She did know it."

Mary's joy and wonder did not need the words they could not find.

"Yes, in that hour I had with her, the evening before she died, you remember? I told Ilien that I had fully

decided, soon or late, to go to China as a medical missionary."

"Was she able to speak? To make you know what it meant to her?"

For a moment Balfrey did not reply, then, with an irrepressible quiver in his voice he said gently:

"Her eyes said all . . . but after a little I heard the child murmur words of Scripture . . . brokenly . . . they were not easy to recognize, but in the end I divined them . . ." lower still his voice fell as he repeated, "*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*"

When the Major spoke again it was to say in his wonted, matter-of-fact manner:

"When you think of it, if there had

been no other reason, a man in my place could have done no less than volunteer for this service." Noting Mary's questioning glance, he added, "I shall always have the thought to carry with me that it was the shock of unexpectedly seeing my poor, shot-up countenance, after the long interval in which we had not met, which caused the accident to Ilien. Now I suppose it may be time to look at our watches."

Mary rose. The moment, surcharged with emotion, must, fortunately, be shaped by the outward conditions about them.

"Yes, you may have a few things to do, sailing day after to-morrow," she said. They moved together to the door. "We shall hardly meet again."

"No, not on this side. But in 1920 or 1921, if I am, as I hope to be, in

China, then we shall meet there, is it not so?"

"China is a very large country, Major Balfrey."

"But that is unimportant. We shall meet, Mary, if you permit it. That is a privilege which only you could deny me."

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